

For Information Only

Value of Parks and Green Spaces

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Recommendation

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Background

Parks and green spaces are vital in creating and sustaining a healthy community by promoting public health, connecting people to the outdoors and helping to create an overall sense of well being. The Council of the City of Greater Sudbury has continually acknowledged the advantages of parks in Greater Sudbury by investing in both existing and new parks.

The Trust of Public Land is an organization that helps communities create parks and healthy lifestyles, resulting in both livable and sustainable cities. A goal of this organization is to ensure that everyone has parks, gardens, playgrounds, trails, and other natural places within a ten-minute walk from home. Similarly, the City of Greater Sudbury Parks, Open Space & Leisure Master Plan Review identified the need for a neighbourhood, natural and or a linear park to be within a ten-minute walk for people from their homes. An abundance of parks and green spaces available to residents of Greater Sudbury within close proximity is validated in the latest OMBI report. The City of Greater Sudbury ranks among the highest of the respondents in regards to having the largest amount of total parkland available to residents. The median for total parkland in 2012 is 585 hectares, while Greater Sudbury ranks at having a total of 2400 hectares per resident. This includes both maintained and natural parkland.

The Trust of Public Land has released a brochure identifying the benefits of parks – Appendix A - 8 Ways That Parks Improve Your Health. This document provides statistical information on the benefits of parks and how they positively influence the lives of people and their communities. Cities that have a large number of parks which are well maintained have a greater number people exercising. This adds to the general physical health of people. Amenities such as programs, activities and exercise areas are identified as key features within a park that attract people to the area. Utilizing parks and green spaces is recognized as an economical way to stay healthy and a key component to promoting overall mental well being.

Signed By

Report Prepared By

Jason Nelson
Coordinator of Community Initiatives
and Quality Assurance
Digitally Signed Jul 28, 14

Division Review

Real Carre
Director of Leisure Services
Digitally Signed Jul 29, 14

Recommended by the Department

Catherine Matheson
General Manager of Community
Development
Digitally Signed Jul 29, 14

Recommended by the C.A.O.

Doug Nadorozny
Chief Administrative Officer
Digitally Signed Jul 31, 14

Conclusion

8 Ways That Parks Improve Your Health is a valuable resource for identifying the importance of parks and the role they play in the growth and sustainability of a community.



1 Research has shown that physical activity is one of the most important contributors to fitness and health.^{1,2} But 95 percent of U.S. adults, 92 percent of adolescents, and 58 percent of children aren't getting the recommended amount of daily physical activity.³ Parks can help. The more parks there are in a community, the more people exercise.⁴⁻⁶ People who live closer to parks exercise more.⁷ And people who regularly use parks get more exercise than people who don't.⁷⁻⁹ The takeaway? Building new parks—and improving existing parks—is a great way to keep people active.

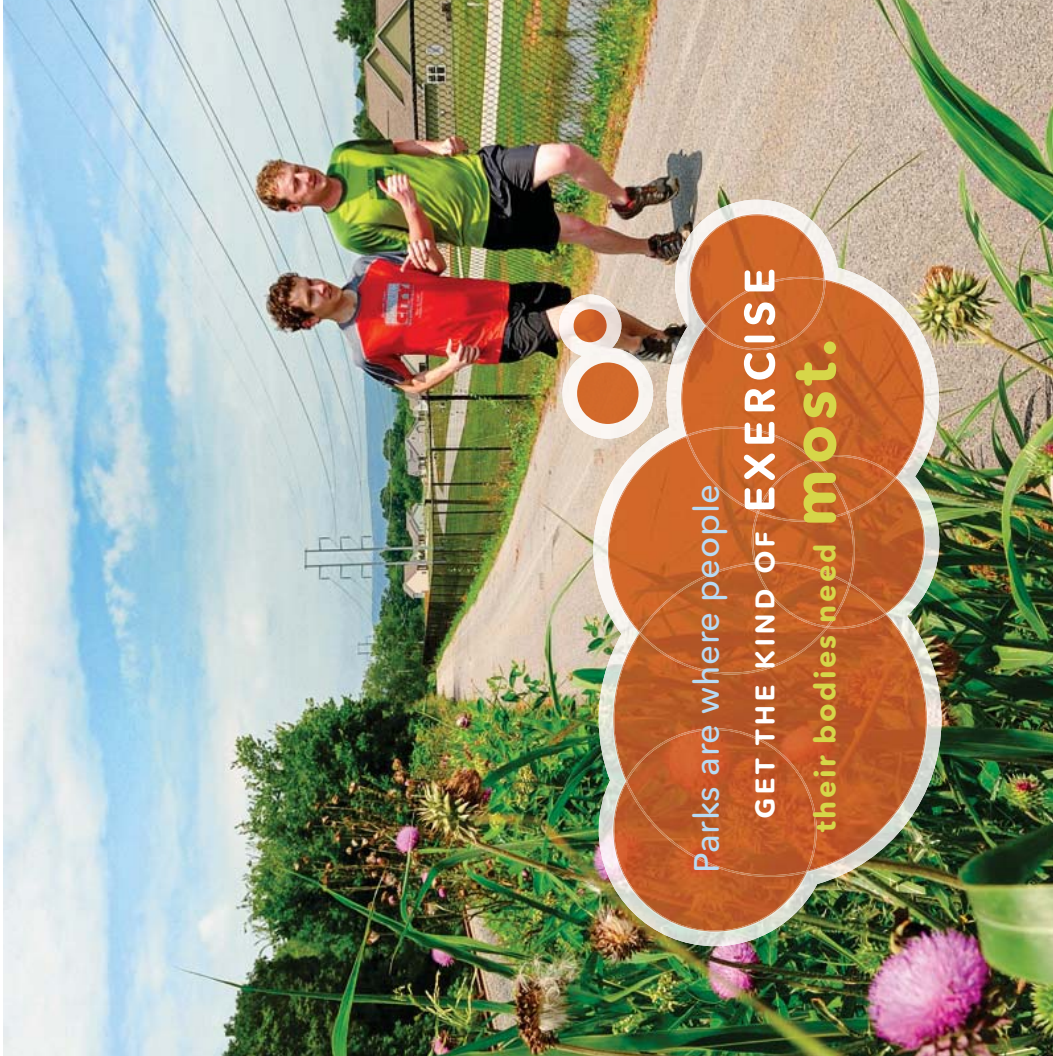


ANNA KUPFERBERG



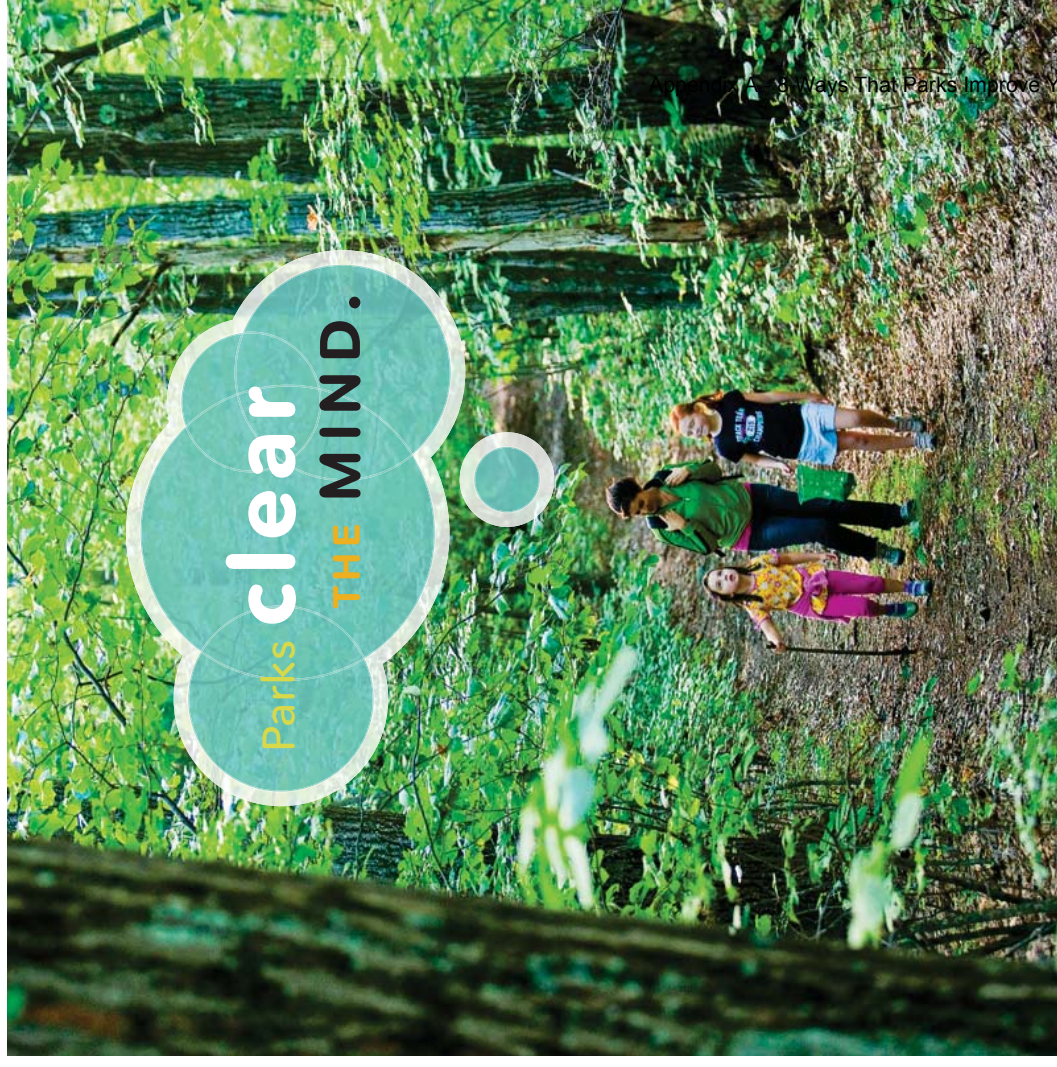
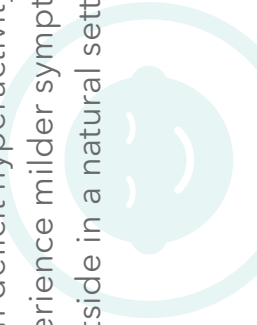
If you build it,
THEY WILL COME—
and **exercise.**

2. While any physical activity is better than none, nothing builds fitness as well as exercise that raises a sweat and gets our hearts pumping. Parks are where much of that type of exercise occurs. According to one study, approximately 12 percent of moderate exercise takes place in neighborhood parks. But for vigorous exercise, the proportion soars to 50 percent.¹⁰



Parks are where people
GET THE KIND OF **EXERCISE**
their bodies need **most.**

3 Most people know from experience that exercise can leave us with a sense of calm and well-being.¹¹ But more surprising is that people who live closer to parks report better mental health—even if they don't actually exercise there.¹²⁻¹⁵ This may be particularly true for parks with a lot of trees, grass, and other natural features, as studies show that exposure to nature can reduce stress and promote relaxation.^{12,16,17} Time spent in green outdoor spaces has also been shown to boost focus and concentration in both adults and children.¹⁶ Kids with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) experience milder symptoms when they play outside in a natural setting.^{18,19}



JERRY AND MARCY MONKMAN

4. Sprucing up a park has been shown to increase the number of people who visit and exercise there, sometimes dramatically. The more aesthetically pleasing a park, the more likely people are to exercise there and in surrounding neighborhoods.²⁰⁻²² Larger parks with more facilities are more likely to be used.^{23,24} Simply improving park signage has been shown to increase park use, and more substantial renovations can go even further.^{25,26} Of two recently renovated San Francisco parks, one experienced a more than fivefold increase in park use; in the other park, use nearly doubled.²⁷

ALLANA WESLEY-WHITE



A makeover
CAN MAXIMIZE

A PARK'S POTENTIAL
to improve
public health.



5. It's no surprise that park features like basketball courts and playing fields encourage physical activity.^{28,29} But recent research has shown that the same is true of the humble walking path, which provides a place to exercise for people of all ages.^{30,31} And while you'd expect a skate park to attract skaters, it turns out that adding one can increase park use overall—even among those who'd never step foot on a board.³²



Features as different

AS WALKING PATHS

AND skate parks

can **attract**

park users.

6. Trust for Public Land Fitness Zones[®] are special areas of public parks set aside for free outdoor exercise equipment. One study indicated that Fitness Zones attract new users to parks, encourage former park users to return to parks, and increase the amount of physical activity that occurs in parks—even among visitors who are not themselves using the equipment.³³ Fitness Zones have proven particularly popular with women, who typically use parks less often than men.³³ And when Fitness Zones are installed near playgrounds, they allow adults to model healthy behavior for their children, encouraging kids to develop good habits that can last a lifetime.



ALLANA WESLEY WHITE

7 Team sports, clubs, classes, exercise groups—parks that offer these are those that don't.^{8,30} Classes at skate parks have been shown to increase their popularity—especially among girls, who might not otherwise use them.³² Without programming and distinctive features to attract visitors, park use declines.³⁴ Lack of programming may be one reason parks in lower-income neighborhoods are less likely to be used than those in neighborhoods where incomes are higher.²³



TOMMY LEONARDI

8 Exercise is one of the cheapest ways to stay healthy. One recent study found that exercise can prevent chronic diseases as effectively as medication.³⁵ Another found that moderately active retirees had significantly lower health care costs than sedentary retirees.³⁶ Building new parks, upgrading old ones, and enriching all parks with programming and features that promote exercise is not only good medicine, it's also good for the bottom line.



JERRY AND MARCY MONKMAN



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THE TRUST FOR PUBLIC LAND CONSERVES LAND FOR PEOPLE TO
ENJOY AS PARKS, GARDENS, AND OTHER NATURAL PLACES, ENSURING
LIVABLE COMMUNITIES FOR GENERATIONS TO COME.

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